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THE STORY OF A HELPFUL QUEEN.

BY CARMEN SYLVA (THE QUEEN OF ROUMANIA).

ONCE upon a time there lived a good Queen. She would fain have assuaged all the suffering she saw on earth. But the more good she did, the more distress seemed to increase. Her means were inadequate to help the poor, her words proved unequal to the task of freeing those in sorrow from their grief, and her hands were unable to bring healing to the sick. Then the thought occurred to her that it must be impossible that God should have intended the world to be so full of misery; she felt that mankind was destined to be happy, if only it knew how.

One day she entered a church and prayed to God with an intensity the full strength of which she was unable to realize at the time. She prayed, as many other foolish mortals pray, who do not know what it would mean to them if their prayers were granted. She prayed: "Oh, Lord! Let me be able to bring happiness to those that suffer, even if I must take their burden upon myself." She left the church with an anxious heart, wondering whether God had heard her prayer. For sometimes God does not seem to hear us when we pray. But on the very same day it was made clear to her that her prayer had been heard.

She met a boy being wheeled in his sick chair, who had never been able to walk a step in his life. She had known him for long, and he loved the good Queen with all the strength of his soul. As was her habit, she went up to him, took his thin hand in hers, and spoke to him in her melodious voice of his early recovery. The boy's eyes seemed to grow larger as she spoke. She felt as if his glance drew all the strength from within her; she was suddenly overtaken by a sense of fatigue such as she had never known before. And, all at once, the boy rose up straight

from his couch, and said, as if in a dream: "I think I can walk." Then he got on his feet and stepped out as though he had never been lame in his life. The Queen smiled sadly at the sight of his gladness. She went home and lay many weeks in bed suffering from lameness. Her limbs were as though they had perished. Still, she declined the help of the doctor and said that in due time God would take her suffering from her. And so it was. Henceforth she suffered from one illness after the other; she became blind, deaf, mute, and fell into high fever; but only to emerge younger and more beautiful—glorified, as it were, by every trial through which she passed. Nobody ever heard her utter a word of complaint. Her miraculous powers for healing the sick became known far and wide, although she never spoke of them, and people thronged around her and besought her to alleviate their sufferings, without having an idea of the sacrifice it involved for her. It was only rumored that the Queen exposed herself to all kinds of infection and would take no precautions against them, particularly where children were concerned. Her poverty soon became equal to her other trials.

She was ingenious in procuring work for others, but she herself had long since had nothing left to give. She was forced to begrudge herself the smallest luxury, for she was bereft of every means for procuring it. And although her devoted husband often assisted her from his own, yet she fell at last into the same plight as Saint Elizabeth of old—she had scarcely a gown left to cover her. And still her name was blessed a thousand times. People came to her from far and near. They tried to grasp her hand, to catch a glance from her eyes, the splendid radiance of which soothed all those who looked into them. She spread an atmosphere of peace and happiness around her, and even those gained joyful contentment who had been most ungodly. Nobody could resist the placid influence which emanated from her person.

But what was harder to bear than all were the dark hours of misconception, when she had been the means of fostering peace and was only requited by the slander of evil tongues in her own home. This almost made her forget that it was all part and parcel of the blessings which her miraculous gift had vouchsafed her.

She wept in silence. But soon the clouds lifted again, and she realized that she was ordained to take the spiritual sufferings of others upon herself. From that moment her patience became

inexhaustible. And people forgot that they had ill-treated her, and fancied that they had always venerated her and never misunderstood or maligned her. She smiled sadly as she thought of all this in her solitude. One glance from her had enabled them to forget the past.

It was a remarkable experience to her to have to suffer the pangs of repentance of a guilty conscience, as if she herself had committed some great crime. This was the result of bringing back to the right road one who had lain and fallen under great temptation. This was, indeed, hard to bear; for she knew herself to be free from guilt or blame, and yet her poor heart beat day and night in mortal anguish. At times she was conscious that this could only be a transitory state of mind of hers, like all the others she had passed through; but her sufferings were great indeed.

One day she was visited by a poor woman. "Oh, dear, gracious Queen," she cried, "my only son is dying! And I know that you possess miraculous herbs which can effect a cure in cases where no mortal can afford help!"

Without hesitation, the Queen hurried to the bedside of the gasping youth. He opened his eyes, which were already nearly closed, and looked at the Queen; and that one glance rekindled the dying flame of life. Breath returned to him; the pallid, cold lips grew red and warm, and the grateful mother sank down before the Queen, embracing her feet, and then fondling her son who was saved.

On her return home the Queen did not feel so weary as usual, and yet she fully expected to be struck down by a severe illness, if not indeed by death. But what was her agony when, the very next day, her only child fell seriously ill and appeared to be hurrying towards certain death. "O Lord, O Lord," she cried, "do not ask this sacrifice of me, for it is beyond my strength." But her supplications were in vain. In vain was her experienced nursing. The glance of her eyes had lost its power here. Her child did not look up again, and only murmured, at times, of beautiful angels and flowers, until at last it lay pale and cold in her arms—and she a broken woman, bereft of tears, without strength to utter a moan, utterly consumed with grief. Henceforth her miraculous power seemed to have deserted her.

People said she had lost faith in her mysterious herbs. Dark

days indeed were in store for the poor Queen. She cursed herself and her prayers. She said to herself that it was her fault that the husband she adored was now as unhappy as she was herself. The world seemed to her to be dark indeed. She only saw night around her; no sunrise, no lovely trees, and no heavenly justice; naught of all that which in other days had gladdened her heart. She who had never complained before, so long as she thought she could relieve others from their suffering, now thought heaven to be cruel, and she no longer possessed the strength to rejoice with the mother whose child she had saved from impending death. For the first time for many a day, during which she had been ceaselessly racked by anguish and doubt, she fell asleep.

And it seemed to her that the door opened, and her child came towards her, happy and radiant. He sat down by her bedside and took her hand, and the dull heaviness of pain was lifted from her heart. He breathed with a breath as of violets, and joy possessed her. He spoke to her with the voice of a clear and resonant bell.

"Mother! Weep not! You have given me a greater happiness than is known on Earth—even through the sublimity of Love; for you have opened up the Heavens to me. And I have been permitted to return there without pain and sorrow—thanks to your self-sacrifice. Mother, weep not! I am ever near you. You were guilty of a pious error when you undertook to banish all suffering from the world; and this error you had to atone for in sorrow and ashes. For the world is exactly as God ordains that it should be—a mine, a furnace, a crucible—a brief passage from one existence unto another, which is higher or meaner in accordance with the life we have practised on earth. Be patient, mother—your hour of release is near, and I am always by your side with all my fervor and strength. You can still console others, because you believe in the world to come—yes, because you know for certain that it awaits us all. There is no such thing as Death! There is only a Re-birth. And if, O Mother! you only knew how beautiful it is, you would await it radiant with joy and never sigh again! It is necessary that Poverty, Sickness, Injustice and War should exist; for these are means of purification, of mutual help and mercy. Therefore are all those blessed who help them that suffer with all their strength, with all self-sacrifice staking all they have to give. But they cannot make this world a Paradise; that is not permitted to them. For the World is indeed a

Laboratory which, according to worldly conceits, we call Hell or Purgatory."

Here the Queen awoke, and from that hour peace entered into her soul. She was able to do good, to console and to give pleasure to others, but no longer to cure them! And she no longer asked for power to do these things, for she was quiet and content, and Peace reigned around her.

CARMEN SYLVA.

Sinaja October 30th, 1898.